

Third Sunday after Trinity;

Luke 15:1-10

Parable of the Lost Sheep: A marvelously comforting sermon that Luther first preached to the Elector of Saxony in 1533.

Luke 15:1-10 K.J.V.

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

1. This Gospel contains the teaching we hold and boast of as our chief doctrine, which is called the true Christian teaching, namely, the doctrine of grace and forgiveness of sins, and Christian liberty from the law. It is a very loving and friendly admonition to repentance and the knowledge of Christ. And it is ever a pity, that a godless, impudent person should be permitted to hear such an excellent, comforting and joyful sermon. And yet it is more sad, that every one graduates so soon in it and masters it so that he thinks he knows it so well that he can learn nothing more from it. Yet God, our Lord,

does not permit himself to become vexed or weary in repeating it yearly, yea, every day, and enforces it as though he knew nothing else to preach, and as though he had no other skill or art. While we poor, wretched people immediately become so overlearned, so satisfied, tired of it and disgusted besides, that we have no longer a desire or love for it.

2. But before we take up the subject taught in this Gospel, let us first examine what St. Luke gives as an introduction to show what prompted Christ to preach the following sermon, when he says: "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him," because they wanted to be near him to hear his word, and he expresses freely and plainly what kind of people he had about him, namely, those who openly lived as they should not live, and were called downright sinners and wicked people. Thus it would appear that the Pharisees had sufficient reason to blame him, because he, who pretended to be a pious and holy man kept company with such low characters.

3. For at that time the men scattered hither and thither through the land were called publicans, to whom the Romans gave charge of a city, or of the revenue, or other duties or offices, and required of them a certain amount of revenue; just as the Turks or Venetians now assign a city or office to a certain person from which he must give many thousands of dollars a year, and whatever he extorts over and above that amount is his own. In this manner they proceeded. Those who collected such revenue and tax proceeded so that they had a profit from it. And as this sum thus appointed was large for each city or office, the officers extorted without let or hindrance, so that they might enjoy more as their own; for their masters were so close with them that they could not gain much for themselves, if they desired to act justly and take advantage of no one. Hence they were reported in all lands as being great extortioners in whom little good or honesty could be found.

4. Thus the other great crowds in general were called "sinners," who otherwise were worse people and publicly lived in a shameful and wild way, in covetousness, adultery and the like. Such drew near to Christ in order to hear him, since they had heard, that in the light of his doctrine and his many miracles he was an excellent man.

5. Now, after all, there was a spark or two of virtue and honesty in them, that they had a desire for Christ and gladly heard his doctrine, and see what he did. Inasmuch as they well knew that he was a good man, and heard nothing but good of him, both in words and deeds, so that their doings did neither agree nor harmonize with his life; and yet they feel no enmity against him, nor flee from him, but go to him, not to seek anything evil in him, but to see and hear something good, and to hope that they might become better.

6. The Pharisees and the scribes, on the contrary, who were held and esteemed as the most pious and holy, were such poisonous reptiles, that they were not only enemies of Christ, and could not bear to see or hear him, nor suffer poor sinners to come to him and hear him that they might be made better, yet they even murmured and blamed him for harboring and receiving them, and said: Behold, is this that excellent and holy man? Who will now say that he is of God, as he associates with such rogues and wicked people? Yes, he is a *"wine-bibber and a glutton,"* and they say in another place, *"a friend of publicans and sinners."*

7. Such names he must bear from these holy people, not because he was riotous or given to gluttony and drunkenness, but only because he permitted them to come to him, and did not thrust them from him nor despise them. For they thought he should have done so, and should have gone forth in a gray frock with a sour countenance and remained secluded from common people, and when he saw such publicans and sinners, he should have held his nose and looked the other way, so that he would not become polluted by them, as they themselves like holy people were accustomed to do. As Isaiah, 65:5, writes of them: that they kept themselves so pure that they would not dare to touch a sinner; as may also be seen in the example of Luke 7:39, where the Pharisees so bitterly opposed Christ, because he allowed himself to be touched by a woman who was a sinner. Now, these were they who at all times desired to be his master, and to prescribe to him and give him rules how he should conduct himself and live holy. Hence they murmur here, because he does not hold to them and avoid such public, sinners as they do.

8. Now Christ is also a little self-willed and shows here that he is simply not to be dictated to by any one, and that he will be free in all things, as we see also everywhere in the Gospel, that a peculiar firmness or self-will is found in this man, who is nevertheless at other times so mild a man, willing and ready to help, the like of whom was never found on earth. But when they came to him with laws and wanted to be his teachers, then all friendship was at an end, he starts and bounds back, as when you strike on an anvil, and he speaks and does just the contrary they demand of him, although they even say rightly and well, and have God's word for it, as they do here where they come and say: You should do thus, you should hold to the society of good people and not to sinners. This is a precious doctrine taken out of the Scriptures; for Moses himself writes that they should avoid the wicked, and put away evil from among them. They have the text on their side, and come trolling with their Moses, and want to bind him and rule him by their laws.

9. But, whether it be God's law or the law of man, he will in short be unbound, like the unicorn, of which it is said, that it cannot be taken alive, it matters not how you attempt it. It will suffer itself to be pierced, shot and killed, but it will never submit to be taken. Thus Christ also acts, although you approach him with laws to throw them over him, he will not endure it, but he bursts through them as through a spider's web, and gives to them besides a good lecture. As in Mat. 12:3, where they blamed his disciples because they plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, citing the divine command to keep the Sabbath day holy; he turns it around altogether and bursts through the commandment and proves besides, both by Scriptures and examples, just the contrary. Again, in Mat. 16:22-23, where he tells his Apostles how he shall suffer and be crucified, and when Peter with good intentions comes forth with the law of love and sets before him God's commandment and says: "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall never be unto thee." In this connection he also gives him a good strong reply, and handles him roughly and unfriendly, and says: "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.

10. In short, wherever they begin to deal with him only according to laws, he resents it and will be free from all laws, and be the Lord of them all, by which he thrusts them from him, and will observe no law at all, as though he were bound to keep it. And yet, on the contrary, when it springs from himself no law is so trifling, but that he will gladly keep it, yea, even much more than the law could demand, so that a more willing servant could not be found, when he is left free without a master. Yea, he even humbles himself as lowly as to wash and kiss the feet of Judas, his betrayer, and even protects his disciples at night, as history relates of him, and we may well believe, as he says himself, Mat. 20:28: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." There, of course, belong the works of the law, but not as springing out of the law nor compelled by the law. As also may be seen by his life in that he always goes about hither and thither in the land, sleeps at night on the bare earth, fasts forty days without rest, and performs so many labors that they feared he might lose his mind, Mark 3:21, or harm his body. He does whatever he should and can, but he will be free and unbound, and will have no laws prescribed to him, and wherever one attempts it, there he halts and defends himself most determinedly. Thus he is both the most obstinate and the most kind of all men, and at the same time he is neither stubborn nor slavish, who will do nothing to which he is driven by the law, and yet he does all things in abundance like a flood of good works, when he is only permitted to work of his own free will, without being mastered and taught.

11. This has been written for us as an example, that we may learn what a true Christian man he is according to the Spirit, and that we should not judge him according to the

law, nor master him according to our own shrewdness; for this reason also Christ is our Lord, that he may make out of us such people as he is himself. And as he will not suffer himself to be bound by any laws, but is Lord over the law and all things, thus also the faith of a Christian church should not suffer it. For through Christ and his baptism we are to be so highly exalted and liberated that our conscience according to faith may know no law, but simply remain unmastered and unjudged by the same, that nothing else may be so cheerful to us according to the internal experience of conscience, than as though no law had ever appeared on earth, neither ten nor one commandment, either of God, or the Pope, or the emperor; but at all times stand in liberty, that we can say: I know no law, and do not desire to know any.

12. For in this state and nature by virtue of which we became Christians, all human works cease, and hence all law. For where there is no work, there can be no law to demand work and to say: do this, leave that; but we are through baptism and through the blood of Christ simply free from all works, and justified by mere grace and mercy, and even live before God alone by them. This is, I say, our treasure, according to which we are Christians and live and stand before God. For how we should live according to the outward life in our flesh and blood before the world, has nothing whatever to do here.

13. Therefore a Christian must so learn to rule his conscience before God as not to permit himself to be ensnared by any law, but whenever his faith is attacked by the law, let him defend himself against it, and act as Christ does here and in other places, where he shows himself so firm, exceptional and odd, that neither Moses nor any legal exacter can do anything with him, although he is otherwise the most humble, the most gentle and friendly of men.

14. However, this is an excellent and sublime art, which no one knows but he alone who was the master of it, who was able to defy all laws and teachers of law. But we cannot attain to this high degree, for the devil sports with our flesh and blood, when he attacks a man in his conscience and makes him tell what he has done and not done, and disputes with him both concerning his sins and piety. Here a man is drawn into a pit of clay and deep mire, so that he cannot extricate himself, but only sinks deeper and deeper. For it rests upon him as a heavy load and presses him down, so that he is not able to rise above it, under which he goes on and consumes himself with it, and can not obtain peace. As I also feel in my own experience, when with my labor I can not extricate myself, although I labor incessantly, and though I strangle myself to get out of the pit, that I might rise above the law, and accomplish enough to compel it to be quiet and say: Well, you have done sufficient, now I am satisfied with thee! But it amounts to nothing, for it is such a deep pit and mire, out of which no one can emerge, even if he

take the whole world to his assistance, as all can bear me witness who have tried it, and still daily experience.

15. Now the cause of this is that our entire nature is so that it is in short inclined to be occupied with works and laws and hear what they dictate and follow those who say: Why does he eat with publicans and sinners? If he would eat and drink with us, then he would do right. Again: Why do your disciples pluck the ears of corn and do what one ought not to do on the Sabbath day? And they always act and dispute with the law until it says: Now you are good. For it can not rise higher nor understand anything better than that the doctrine of the law is the highest doctrine, and its righteousness is the best life before God. Thus human nature remains in the law, forever captive and bound. And as it lays hold and makes the attempt, it can never quiet the law, so that it has nothing to demand or to punish, but is compelled to remain captive under the law as in a perpetual prison. And the longer human nature struggles and afflicts itself with the law, the worse it becomes until entirely overcome.

16. What then am I to do when the law attacks me and oppresses my conscience, because I am conscious of not having done what it requires? I answer: Behold what Christ does here, he sets his head against it, and grows firm, and allows no law to be forced upon him, even though it be taken from the law of God. Thus you must learn to do, and flatly say to it: My dear law, let your contention cease, and go your own way, for I have nothing to do with thee; yes, just because you come to dispute with me and inquire how good I am, I will not hear thee; for nothing avails before this judge, with whom we now dispute, nothing what I am and shall do or not do; but only what Christ is, gives and does. For we are now in the bridal chamber, where the bride and the bridegroom should be alone, you have no right to enter there, or speak on this subject.

17. However in this very way the law still continues to knock and say: Yes, nevertheless you must do good works, keep God's commandment, if you want to be saved. Here answer again: Do you not clearly hear, that it avails nothing now to consider this. For I have already my righteousness and the sum of all salvation in Christ my Lord without any works, and I was already saved long before thou camest, so that I have no need whatever of thee. For as I said, where works are of no avail, the law also amounts to nothing, and where no law is there is also no sin. Therefore nothing shall rule here except the bride alone in the bridal chamber with Christ, in whom she possesses all things together, and lacks nothing that is necessary unto salvation, and the law must remain excluded with drums and trumpets, and courageously despised and banished when it would attack the conscience. For it does not belong here, it comes out of season, and wants to make a great ado where it should not intrude, for here we are in the sphere

of the article of faith; I believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, who suffered for me, died and was buried, rose again from the dead, etc. Before him must give place the law of Moses, of the emperor and of God, and I am to repel everything that would dispute with me about sin, right or wrong, and everything I may do.

18. Behold, Christ would here present to us such liberty, so that we as Christians according to our faith may tolerate no other master, but only hold that we are baptized and called unto Christ, and through him have become justified and sanctified, and say: This is my righteousness, my treasure, my work and everything against sin and wrong, which the law can do and bring against me. If you want another righteousness, work, law, sin, then take them where you may, you will not find them in me. In this way a man may defend himself and withstand the suggestions and temptations of the devil, either referring to past or present sins; so that these two may be kept wide apart, Moses and Christ, works and faith, conscience and the outward life; so that when the law attacks me and would terrify my heart, then it is time to give the good law a furlough, and if it will not go, bravely drive it away, and say: Gladly would I do and promote good works where I can at the proper time, when among the people; but here where my conscience must stand before God, I will know nothing of them, in this only let me alone, and do not speak to me of what I do or fail to do. Here I will not listen either to Moses or the Pharisees, but my baptism and Christ only shall reign here in full sway, and I will like Mary sit at his feet and hear his Word. But Martha must stay out and go about in the kitchen and do her housework, and in short, leave the conscience alone.

19. But how is it, if I still continually have sin in me, that is certainly not right? I answer: It is true, I am a sinner and do wrong; but I am not going to despair on that account nor run straight to hell, or flee from the law; for I have still a righteousness and work far above Moses, by which I apprehend him who has apprehended me, and I cleave to him who has embraced me in baptism and laid me in his bosom, and by his Gospel has promoted me to the fellowship of all his benefits, and commands me to believe in him. Where he is, there I command the Pharisees, and Moses with his tables, all lawyers with their books, all men with their works, immediately to be silent and depart. For here no law has any right to accuse or demand, although I have not done it nor can I do it, for in Christ I have all things in abundance, whatever I need or lack.

20. Such, I say, is the Christian's doctrine and skill, and it belongs only where Christ reigns, and the conscience acts as in God's presence. But this is not preached to rough, impudent and light-minded people, who understand nothing of it, and who as St. Peter says in his second Epistle, 3:6, only confuse and pervert such doctrine to their own condemnation, from which they take license to live as they please, and say: Ho! why

shall I do good works? What harm is it if I am a sinner? Has not Christ abolished the law? Now, this too will not avail, for here you must view Christ from another point, and observe what he further does. For here he himself says that he is the man who seeks the poor lost sheep, and besides proves it by his present deed, in that he receives publicans and sinners, and preaches to them. Here you will see that he does a great deal more than what the law has commanded, and by his example also teaches thee to do likewise. He is so proud that he will not be under the law; and again he is so willing that he desires to do much more than the law can require. Do thou also likewise, and wait not first until you are driven and tormented with the law, but do what you should of your own accord without the law, as St Peter admonishes, 1 Pet. 2:16 "As free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bond servants of God;" and in Rom. 6:18 says: "And being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness." These are they who do all things with a free conscience without the coercing of the law.

21. For where the Gospel is truly in the heart, it creates a new man who does not wait until the law comes, but, being so full of joy in Christ, and of desire and love for that which is good, he gladly helps and does good to every one wherever he can, from a free heart, before he ever once thinks of the law. He wholly risks his body and life, without asking what he must suffer on account of it, and thus abounds in good works which flow forth of themselves. Just like Christ will not be compelled to pick up a straw, but without compulsion he permits himself to be nailed to the cross for me and the whole world, and dies for the lost sheep. This may indeed be called work above work.

22. Therefore learn now carefully to discriminate, both rightly to place and to divide these things, when it comes to the test, and when the law and sin would dispute with the conscience, that you courageously take the word out of the mouth of Moses and tell him to be still, and order him out to your old man, whom you are to lead into the school of Moses, that he may dispute with him and say: Listen, you are both lazy and slow to do good, and to serve your neighbor. When you should praise Christ, you rather drink a bottle of beer. And before you expose yourself to danger for Christ's sake, you prefer to rob and cheat your neighbor wherever you can. For the same lazy scoundrel who will not move, whose hands will not work, whose feet will not go where they should, whose eyes are not chaste, here you may take stones and smite the old Adam until he does move.

23. Therefore, when Moses attacks me where it is right, I am to say to him, I will gladly hear and follow thee, namely with my hands and life, aside from the faith and righteousness of my conscience before God, there thou mayest reign like a schoolmaster amid the servants of the family, and order me to be obedient, chaste and patient, to do

good to my neighbor, to help the poor, to praise and honor God, besides allow myself to be disgraced and slandered for the sake of his Word, and suffer the world to bring upon me all its torments. In all this I am well pleased, and am willing to do even more than I am able as to the outward man. For Christ says the spirit is willing, and more than willing, but the flesh is weak. For thus he permits himself to be circumcised, to offer in the temple, to be scourged and crucified, none of which was necessary for him, nor could the law demand them from him. But should Moses go further, where he has no right, that is, into my heart and conscience, there I will neither hear nor see him. For there I have another great and unspeakable treasure, called Christ, with his baptism and Gospel. In a word, what concerns the outer man, there Moses cannot burden nor urge too much, but he dare not in the least burden the conscience. For where the Spirit is who brings us Christ, he is above all law, as St. Paul says, 1 Tim. 1:9: "That law is not made for a righteous man," and yet he at the same time does more than he is able to accomplish according to the flesh. For after the flesh we are nothing but sinners, and as to our person we would of course have to remain condemned under the law; but by virtue of Christ and baptism we rise high above all law.

24. Thus let Moses carry on his rough work, aside from Christ to urge those who are not Christians, or ever spur the old Adam. For Christians he cannot thereby make either pious or righteous; but of course he does this, namely, he shows them their duty, which according to the Spirit they gladly do, and much more besides, except that the flesh does not willingly follow nor obey the Spirit, so that on this account they still need not be admonished and urged. But at the same time the conscience must remain free, for the law has no right here before God to accuse and condemn. Wherefore in Christianity such doctrine and admonition must be upheld, as even the Apostles did, whereby every one is admonished and reminded of the duty of his calling.

25. But Moses must be allowed to have absolute rule over those who are not Christians, and burden them both outwardly and inwardly, so that he may force and torment them to do what is right and omit what is wrong, although they do it not gladly, like the licentious multitude and stiffnecked people, who neither esteem nor understand the liberty of Christ, although they can prate and boast of the Gospel, and yet they only misuse it for their licentiousness. They should remember that they belong under Moses. For they are not people who can grasp our doctrine. They go along so securely and think they have no need of the Gospel, or that they know it well enough; but it is only for those who thus dispute with the law because of their sins and the wrath of God, and are frightened by it and feel their hearts say to them: Woe is me! how have I lived? How shall I stand before God? And thus they go about too timid and bashful, whereas others are too hard and presumptuous, so that they neither feel nor care for any law nor for their

sins and distress. Hence to both it is unequally distributed, so that those who ought to have nothing to do with the law are the only ones to feel it and they have too much of it; but the others, who only ought to feel it, do not concern themselves about it at all; yes, the more you try to terrify them with the law and the wrath of God, the harder they become. Therefore they need another master, namely, the hangman and the sheriff to teach them; if they will not do good in God's name, that they may be obliged to do it in the name of some one else, and have no thanks for it, but receive hell-fire and all torments as their reward.

26. On the contrary, Christ, here and everywhere, as I have said, teaches us, who feel our sins and the burden of the law, and would gladly be Christians, both by his example and his sermons, to accustom ourselves to contend against it, and directs us from ourselves to himself, and not to give place to the devil, who by the law would invade the bride chamber of Christ, and sit in his place, that is, rob the conscience of its joy and comfort, in order that he may force man into despair, so as not to be able to lift up his head or heart to God. For this is called the Christian's art, who should learn and know more than the vulgar, profane crowd can know and understand, namely, that they are able to contend against and withstand the devil, when he attacks us and desires to dispute with us with the aid of Moses; so that we simply allow him no argument or conversation, but direct him from Moses to Christ and stay with the latter; for he only goes about cunningly to bring us from Christ under Moses; for he knows when he accomplishes this, he has the victory.

27. Wherefore be on your guard that you be not led from the way or be tempted out of your sphere; but, although he already sets forth many things from the law, which is also God's Word, which you are in duty bound to obey, you can answer him and say: Dost thou indeed not understand that I will now neither know nor hear of any law? For we are now within a sphere and on ground, where there is no question as to what I shall do or leave undone. I already know well enough, that I have not done, nor do I do, what the law requires; but here is the question, how may I acquire a gracious God and the forgiveness of sins, and how shall I learn the article of faith concerning Christ? Here I will abide in the arms of Christ and hang about his neck, and creep into his baptism, God grant it, and let the law say and my heart feel what they may. If we can only keep this chief part pure, and this bulwark firm and well secured, then I will gladly do and suffer externally as much as is laid upon me.

28. Behold, whoever learns this art well is a truly perfect man, as Christ was, so far above all law that he might also call St. Peter a devil, the Pharisees fools and blind leaders, and stop the mouth of Moses and order him to keep quiet, and thus live entirely

without any law, and yet fulfill all laws and be proud and firm against everything that would bind and lead him captive, and yet also of his own free self be serviceable and subject unto all men.

29. But here we are always deficient, that we can never properly learn this, for the devil lies in our path and leads us so far that we pervert it and are only too willing and modest to hear everything the law says and become frightened at it, when we should raise our head and neither hear nor follow it. Again, in external matters, we are only too liable to fall into license, when we should courageously keep down the body and exercise it with the law, that it may be compelled to suffer everything that causes it pain, because it still continually commits sin; yet, so that sin here remain without, where it should remain, and have its Moses to lay upon its back and oppress it. But internally no sin or law ought to reign, but Christ alone with pure grace, joy and consolation. Then all things would go right, and man would be prepared for every good work, both to do and suffer all things with joy, with a glad and willing heart, out of good, honest faith in the grace of God through Christ, [so that the conscience remain a master over all laws, and the flesh be subject to all laws.]

30. Now, whoever can do such things, let him thank God, and see to it, that he be able to do it only not too well or loudly boast that he has great skill. For I, and those like me, can not yet accomplish it as we should, although we have indeed tried it most and practiced it the longest; for it is, as I have said, a skill that no one possesses but Christians, all of whom must remain scholars and learn it all their lives; except only those other secure spirits, who pretend that they alone know everything, and yet with such pretended skill they know nothing at all, and thereby have departed farthest from it. There is not a more vexatious thing, nor a greater affliction or harm that can happen to Christendom than that everything becomes full of factions and sects through such sophists; while they are only people who serve neither God nor the world, and hear rightly neither the law nor the Gospel, but securely despise the former and become disgusted with the latter, and are always seeking some other doctrine. But we do not preach in their behalf, for they are unworthy of it, and are punished by God so that they can never learn it or derive any benefit from it, although they hear it; also, that we nevertheless only retain it and that they take nothing of it from us, except that they hear only an empty sound and noise of it.

This is the first part which Christ here teaches by his own example; [how we should keep our conscience free from all disputations of the law and from all the terrors of the wrath of God and of sin]. Now let us examine this beautiful sermon of the Lord, where he begins and says:

PART II.

”What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?”

31. Christ the Lord is not only firm, in that he refuses to obey their doctrine and despotism, but also shows good reasons for doing so, and with great and fine skill overthrows their objections and stops their mouths, so that they have nothing to say against it, yes, he circumvents them by their own actions and example, and forces them in their very hearts to be ashamed of themselves, that they demanded such things of him and blame him in such weighty matters, which they themselves do in much more trifling things, and wish to do them even with honor.

32. For how could he answer them better than to say: You great masters and dear sophists, would you order and teach me that I should thrust from me poor sinners who desire me and come unto me to hear my words? While even you yourselves for the sake of one lost sheep do much more, when among a hundred you miss a single one, you leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, that is, in the field with the shepherds, standing all alone, and run after the one of the hundred and have no rest until you find it, and this you call a good and praiseworthy deed, and if any one would reprove you for it, you would consider him mad and foolish. And should not I, the Saviour of souls, do the same for men as you do for a sheep, although there is no comparison whatever between a soul and everything else that lives and moves of all the creatures on the earth. Then should you not in your hearts be ashamed of yourselves, to boss and reprove me in a work which is infinitely better than the work you yourselves praise and are compelled to praise? So, if you reprove me, you must first condemn yourselves.

33. This is called giving a good answer, and in all honor putting them to silence, while he gives sufficient reasons why he does not at all need their great authority, yea, he will not, neither should he, endure it. And so they run on as is their nature, for they obtain thus nothing but their own sins and shame. For it is truly a shame to all masters, and an insufferable outrage, for them to attempt to dictate to him, who is appointed of God Lord over all. But it ought to be as I said, whoever desires to direct and judge a Christian, and lead him away from his baptism and the article of faith in Christ, and to govern him by his wisdom and laws, does not only make a fool of himself, but also causes abomination and murder; for he defiles God's temple and sanctuary, and with a devilish outrage invades his kingdom, where he alone should reign through his Holy

Spirit. Wherefore he fairly and justly deserves that God should also put him to sin and shame before all the world, because he wants to be a master in the devil's name, whereas Christ alone is master, and with his head he runs against him who is too high and wise for him.

34. Therefore it is not a good thing to trifle with Christians, for they are living saints, who are undisturbed before all the world only because of their man whose name is Christ; for men gain nothing in him at any rate, as he will not suffer others to teach and rule him. So also a Christian can and should not suffer it, for if he suffers it and gives place and yields to suggestions of this kind, where one would blame and master Christ in him, or attack his faith with the law and doctrine of works, then he is lost and fallen from Christ. Therefore let us only hold firmly to him, and care not if the whole world outwits and masters us. For when we abide in him and hold fast to the true sense of this article of faith, we will easily overcome all such fanatics and put them to shame. For this Christ shall and will remain uncorrected and without a master, but he alone will rule and reform the whole world, so that they shall either by grace acknowledge him as their Lord and Master, and themselves as fools, or without grace be exposed to shame and utterly perish.

35. But, as I have said, this sermon is much too good, sweet and comforting for the coarse, rough crowd, and the mad, knotty mob, and so we do not preach it to them that they may know it; but only to those who are in the terrors and anxiety of conscience, or in the danger and toils of death, and when the devil disputes with them about their sins, to drive them into melancholy and despair. To those this lovely picture must be presented, that they may become comforted and joyful. But the rest, who already live in drunkenness and know but very little of melancholy and spiritual sorrow, are to be diverted to Moses and mister hangman and his servants, and afterwards to the devil. For it is painted so very friendly and much better than any man can paint it, and no one is so eloquent as to outline it or equal it with words, but as much as possible it must be grasped by faith in the heart. However, we must notice a little of it, so as to give an occasion to meditate upon it.

36. Christ says I have a hundred sheep, that is, the little flock of entire Christendom, from which number one is lost and fallen from the communion of Christians. If you would know how it is with my heart, only truly describe such a shepherd and his lost sheep!

37. For while the shepherd is merely a man and tends the dumb animals, created to be slaughtered and killed, yet he has such a sympathetic heart for his lost sheep, that he is

in as great anxiety to find the sheep as it is to find its shepherd. For as soon as the sheep knows, as it does by instinct, that he is its shepherd, it is not at all afraid, but runs up to him with all confidence, and walks along before him in perfect trust. Yes, as soon as it only hears his voice, it bleats and runs after him, and has no rest until it comes to him. And thus there is of course the purest friendship and love between them both, and they have toward each other only one heart and one mind; so that if the lamb could speak and pour out its heart, it would desire nothing but its shepherd. Again, the shepherd has no other cares and anxieties than how he may again find his precious pet, that has gone from him and strayed away. He makes haste, and sends out servants wherever he thinks it may be found, and never ceases until he has found it and brought it home. For he knows well enough what a poor animal it is, as it can live only by the help and under the protection of its shepherd, and can not at all care for itself, but is wholly lost and must perish, if deprived of its shepherd, and besides it is naturally fearful and inclined to stray; and as soon as it leaves the way and loses the shepherd, it is at once discomfited and can not rest, although it comes among other shepherds and sheep, and the stranger calls it, yet it runs in its fright through briers and water and everything before it until it falls a prey to the wolf or otherwise perishes.

38. But still it has in it the virtue and good nature, that it holds with all diligence to its shepherd and knows his voice so well, and when it hears it, it runs immediately to him, and will not permit itself to be taken from him, though all the world may call and coax. And though it be already lost or gone astray, still it has the hope as much as instinct gives it, if it can only once again hear its shepherd, it would be cheerful and void of all care. Thus the shepherd is not for the purpose, when he finds it again, to be angry at it and thrust it away, or to cast it into the jaws of the wolf; but all his cares and thoughts are, only to allure it in the most friendly manner and treat it in the tenderest way, he takes it upon his shoulders, holds and carries it, until he again brings it home.

39. The picture painted before us by this creature of God is, how Christ shows his disposition toward us, what he will do for us and what we may expect from him. For, as all this is true in nature, much more is it true in the kingdom of Christ, which is a kingdom of grace, pure love and consolation. Wherefore keep in mind this sheep that belongs to the shepherd, then you will also find, with how much more and greater affection he takes it to himself and how friendly and perfectly and heartily he cares for it, to bring it back. By this he would set forth and indeed pour out his inexhaustible love and ardent desire toward poor, sinful, frightened and weak consciences, which are his true sheep.

40. For when a man has lost this shepherd and does not hear his voice, it is with him exactly as with the lost sheep, which always wanders ever farther and farther from him. And though he even be allured and called by strange doctrines to run over to them and think it is coming to its shepherd, yet it does not find him, but always runs from one corner to another, and the longer it runs the farther it goes astray, and it has no comfort nor help, until it again hears the voice of its true Shepherd ringing in its ears. As also experience plainly shows us, and every one can experience it in his own heart. For if the second article of the creed concerning Christ be taken away or not taught, then here comes a factious spirit, there a fanatic, where one perverts the sacrament of the altar, the other baptism, and one preaches this, the other that, concerning strange holiness of life, and each one entices the poor sheep to himself, and pretends to be the Shepherd, by which the sheep strays more and more, until it loses the way altogether.

41. Moreover, the devil also joins in with his own thoughts, which he shoots into the heart: Ah, if you had done this and that, or not done it! by which the heart becomes only more fickle and erring, that it does not know whither to go. This certainly takes place when Christ is removed out of sight, and the article of faith concerning him is not taught. It matters not how they teach, advise and admonish, it will only be worse and approach nearer destruction, unless the true Shepherd with his own voice comes again to him.

42. Therefore we should now learn rightly to know and recognize Christ our Lord, that we may not regard him as a tyrant or an angry judge, as hitherto he has been preached to us, and as the devil always presents him to the heart, as one standing behind us with a sword. But as the little lamb naturally beholds its shepherd, not at all as one who would frighten, hunt and strike it down, but as soon as it first sees him, it becomes happy and obtains a hope as though it received help already, and needs no more to fear or care, and runs straight up to him with all confidence.

43. Thus too, if our confidence is to begin, and we become strengthened and comforted, we must well learn the voice of our Shepherd, and let all other voices go, who only lead us astray, and chase and drive us hither and thither. We must hear and grasp only that article which presents Christ to us in the most friendly and comforting manner possible. So that we can say with all confidence: My Lord Jesus Christ is truly the only Shepherd, and I, alas, the lost sheep, which has strayed into the wilderness, and I am anxious and fearful, and would gladly be good, and have a gracious God and peace of conscience, but here I am told that He is as anxious for me as I am for him. I am anxious and in pain about how I shall come to him to secure help, But he is in anxiety and worry and desires nothing else than to bring me again to himself.

44. Behold, if we could thus portray his heart, and press it into our own heart, that he has such a gushing desire, anxiety and longing for us, then we could not dread or fear him, but would joyfully run up to him and abide with him alone, and hear no other doctrine or teacher. For wherever a different doctrine comes, be it of Moses or others, it will certainly accomplish nothing, except only to hunt us down and torment us, so that we can find neither rest nor peace. Wherefore Christ also says, Mat. 11:28-29: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls." As though he would say: Run about and seek wherever you will, hear and learn everything that man can preach, yet you will find no rest nor peace of heart except in me alone.

45. We will gladly permit the preaching of good works, the ten commandments and all other moral teaching; but to preach to the conscience bound in torment and terror on account of its sins, there shall positively be no other word preached except the Word of Christ. For this is that poor lost sheep, which neither shall nor can have and suffer any master, except this its only Shepherd, who does not deal with it by compulsions and the requirements of the law, but in the sweetest and tenderest manner, and takes upon himself the dear sheep with all its distress, sins and anxiety, and himself does what the sheep should do, as we shall hear further.

46. But, as I have sufficiently said before, we must well distinguish here between two kinds of preaching, or the voice of Moses and the voice of Christ, that by no means you may permit any Moses to come to the lost sheep, though his preaching be ever so excellent. For if these things be confused and we attempt to comfort the troubled conscience with the law thus: Be of good cheer, you have not committed murder nor adultery and done any other outrage, or you have indeed meant it all good! This also is comfort, but it will not last long nor hold out against the cuffs of the devil. For this is nothing more nor less than a consolation with yourself, by which the poor sheep is not benefited, for it remains astray and lost in spite of this, and it can not help itself or come to its Shepherd.

47. However, if he is to be helped, he must be shown the true Shepherd, who comes and seeks him to bring him home, and let his voice be heard, then he can receive true comfort, so that he dare answer Moses and say: I now no longer care either for thy comfort or terror, and you may make me just as bad as you can, you may make me a murderer time and again, and say I have hanged my father and mother; but now, because I am in anxiety and terror before the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, I

will neither hear nor obey thee. For I myself feel and confess, that I am, alas, a poor lost sheep; but this is my salvation and comfort in which I triumph, that I have the Shepherd who himself seeks me, his lost sheep, and carries me on his shoulders. Let us now discuss this, and not how good or bad I am, but, how I am to come to Christ.

48. Therefore, all preaching must be adapted to the capacity of the hearers. For I have said that this doctrine is not suited to a carnal and hardened man, even as it does not profit to give a hardy thresher sugar and costly delicacies, which are intended for the sick, but give him a good piece of hard bread and cheese and a drink of water. But other soft and delicate food reserve for the sick and young children, who cannot digest anything hard. Thus you must also observe here how rightly to divide and give each one his proper portion, like a prudent householder. Likewise, that you hold fast to the preaching of Moses and the law, until you find hard and vicious people, who live secure and without fear. These you must permit to eat only the coarse food of common laborers, that is, to hear the angry Moses, who thunders and flashes from Mount Sinai, who destroys the children of Israel and slays them in the desert, and drowns King Pharaoh in the Red Sea.

49. But wherever there are troubled, weak hearts and consciences, which have now become lost sheep, there keep silent about Moses and all the works of God, done under the law, and speak only of the works done by Christ in the time of grace, and well impress the poor conscience how he shows himself toward the lost Sheep; namely, that he is the dear, good Shepherd, who is so anxious and concerned about the sheep that he drops everything and leaves all lay, only that he may find it again, and never ceases until he brings it home. For it grieves him that a man should remain in sin, fear and tremble; and he cannot endure it, that he remains there and perishes. But he calls to thee with his Gospel in the most friendly manner, that you should only come to him, and be taken up and carried on his shoulders, and remain his dear sheep.

50. But that multitude must not be called the lost sheep, which lives securely and riotously and do not concern themselves whether God above is angry or laughs, for it is a wild goat that will not be either led or protected. But those are called the stray, lost sheep, whose sins oppress them and who struggle in the conflict of faith, where there is no danger of losing Moses but Christ and his chief article of faith, that is, where the conscience is in anxiety and worry as to whether God is merciful to him? This is the true sheep which sighs and cries for its Shepherd, and would be glad for help, as David says, Ps. 119:176: "I am gone astray like a lost sheep, seek thy servant," etc. To those the sugar and this friendly sweet refreshment tastes good, by which the heart is revived that it may not despair, but that it may raise itself up again by such consolation, not

through Moses but in Christ; not in order to make Moses his friend or be able to quiet his voice, but because he has a gracious God in his Lord and Christ. God grant it. Let Moses abide with his comfort where he can.

51. Although it is also a fine thing and should be so, that a man should not live contrary to the law, rob, steal, murder, or do his neighbor wrong and cause him pain; yet such a life does not give the heart true comfort, but only tickles the skin, which does not enter the heart nor lasts. For when the devil comes and seizes the heart, he takes away all such comfort, and although you have even done right, yet he of course prefers tenfold against it, where you did the contrary. Yea, in the very best works he can easily find much uncleanness, and turn everything to sin. Therefore nothing can be built on such comfort, but only courageously cast it away, and say: God grant, whether I be good or not, this I will reserve for its proper place, when we come to teach and treat of works; but in this circle in which I now stand, it avails nothing to treat of my works and goodness, but of Christ and his works which he has done for me as his lost sheep. If now you ask whether I am good, I will simply answer: No, and I do not want to be in this circle of good people.

52. But if you ask whether Christ is good, then without hesitation I can say yes, and present him as my righteousness, and defiantly appeal to him. For in him I have been baptized, and I have the seal and document here in the Gospel, that I am his dear sheep, and he is my good and pious Shepherd who seeks his lost sheep, and deals with it entirely without the law, demands nothing of me, neither drives, threats nor frightens, but shows me pure sweet grace, and humbles himself beneath me and takes me upon himself, that I may only lie on his back and be carried. Why should I then fear the terrors and thunderings of Moses, or the devil besides, because I am in the protection of that man who gives me his holiness and everything he has, to possess it as my own, and who carries and holds me so that I cannot be lost, because I remain a sheep and do not deny the Shepherd or maliciously fall from him.

53. Thus you have this picture presented in the most lovely manner it is possible to present it. But all this is done only on account of faith. For the picture is indeed fine and full of comfort, and is the truth itself. But it is wanting in this, that it is not felt in experience as it should be. For while the sheep runs astray, that is, when man feels his sins and they oppress him, and he does not know where to stand, and the devil terrifies him; then only the contrary takes place, and he cannot grasp that it is true, for all that he has here heard entirely departs through his present feelings and experience. For the devil has so perverted his vision that he sees nothing but God's wrath and indignation, by which his heart is so burdened that he cannot raise himself above it or turn his eyes

from it, for he has so deeply sunk into it that he sees nothing else even in Christ than an angry Judge, as he has been hitherto described and forced into all hearts by the scandalous Papists as sitting alone on the rainbow with a sword in his mouth.

54. For the real art and roguery of the devil, which he practices on the poor wandering sheep, are that he perverts this picture and makes a continual bawling in his presence, that he can no more recognize his Shepherd, so that in Christ's name he might lead the man subject to Moses, as he disputes about Christ just as he did before about Moses, so that he indeed needs a strong faith that it is true, and a man first of all must contend against himself on this account. For his own feeling is powerful in itself, and the devil magnifies sin and terror so greatly, that nerve and bone, and the heart in the body, could fail.

55. Therefore it is not so easily learned as some imagine. When all is peace it is easily believed that Christ is sweet and amiable, but when anxiety and terror break forth and overwhelm the heart, then man is blind and wandering, and will judge only according to his heart and feelings, to which he clings and confirms himself in his error, for he is held captive in it, and cannot think otherwise but that it is as he feels it, and yet it is not true.

56. Now this would be an art, were he able to say to his heart: If You acknowledge yourself to be a lost sheep, you speak the truth; but that you would on this account flee from Christ, and imagine him to be a man who would hunt you down and frighten you, this is the work of the sorry devil himself. For if you rightly behold and confess him as your true Shepherd, you would neither be afraid nor frightened at him, but you would run up to him with joy and confidence. For he is not present here to condemn thee, but he comes to seek thee, to carry you on his back, to help and deliver you from sin, error, the power of the devil and every misfortune. If you now feel that you are a sinner and have deserved the wrath of God, then you should just on this account the more earnestly cry and run to your dear Shepherd, that he might deliver you, and you should not imagine him to be anything else than the sheep does its shepherd, which cannot fear him, but is glad and happy as soon as it sees and hears him, although it has strayed away from him, and deserved on this account to fear him. But it knows full well that he bears no anger or indignation against such a sheep, and can expect nothing of him but love and every good thing.

57. Hence everything here depends only upon this, that you rightly learn to look upon Christ according to the Word, and not according to your own thoughts and feelings, for human thoughts are frauds and lies, but his Word is true and cannot lie. For he has even

proved it by living deeds and examples, and daily proves it still throughout the whole of Christendom. Wherefore we must only press the Word close to our hearts, and knit ourselves into it and learn the art to reprove our own heart with its lies, and set this article of faith against it. For this alone must remain true, and everything opposed to it, must be false and a pack of lies. But this is an art which I cannot master, and much less can other vain spirits, who boast so much of it, as though they knew it all, if they have only heard it but once, and yet they never taste or experience anything of it. For it is an easy matter to speak and preach about it; but how difficult it is to prove it in reality, which those thoroughly experience, who are earnestly concerned about it.

58. Now this is the first description of the lovely Christ, set forth by himself in this Gospel, that he pours out all his heart and is so anxious for the sheep, that he goes after it alone, leaving the ninety and nine; not to frighten or strike it, but to help it and bring it home again, and to rejoice the wretched and sorrowful heart and conscience by his sweet and friendly voice, so that on both sides there is nothing but hearty love and joy for each other, that you can see what great love and pleasure you thereby afford him, when you cleave to him with the whole heart and look to him for every good thing.

59. You see in the second place how he pours out his joy and unspeakable goodness by external signs and gestures of every kind, and how, when he has found the sheep, he shows himself so friendly, for he does not deal with it at all according to his own law or force, to which indeed he has a right, to drive it before him like the other sheep, and leave it go alone. On the contrary he lays hold and puts it on his shoulders and carries it himself the whole way through the wilderness, takes all the labor and trouble upon himself only in order that the sheep may have rest and a home, and he does it gladly and heartily for he is full of pure joy, only because he once more has it in his care. And observe also how well it is with the sheep, how it lies in all peace and safety upon the shoulders of its Shepherd, and how well pleased it is that it lies so softly and does not need to travel, is safe and without care, both from dogs and wolves, that is, from all error and lies, danger and destruction. This is indeed a friendly painting, excellent, lovely and refreshing to behold.

60. For just so Christ our Lord does when he delivers us, which he once did bodily by his sufferings and death, but now he continually does in power and spirit by his Word. In this way he lays us on his shoulders, carries and defends us, that we may be safe from all danger of sin, of death and the devil; although they even terrify us, and act as if they would tear us away and devour us. For being thus carried is our salvation, and we remain safe from every peril and need fear nothing; just like the precious lamb that lays on the shoulders of the Shepherd will not let itself be disturbed, although the dogs

already like fiends bark, and the wolf lurks about, while it hangs its head without any care and sweetly sleeps. So we do also, if we stand and abide in this article of faith: I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who suffered, died and rose again for us, etc., then we need not worry about being lost, or that the devil can devour us, though he even opens his jaws ever so wide. For we are not then on our own way, nor do we walk with our own feet, but hang about the neck of our dear Shepherd and lay upon his back, where we are entirely safe. For although sin, death and hell appear ever so wicked and terrible, they cannot devour him; otherwise we poor sheep would too soon be lost and destroyed.

61. For even as the sheep cannot protect or provide for itself that it go not astray, unless the shepherd continually directs and leads it in the way; and when it has strayed and is lost, it cannot of itself find the right way or come to its shepherd, but the shepherd himself must go after it, and seek it until he find it, and when he has found it, he holds and bears it upon his back, that it may no more be frightened away from him, hunted or seized by the wolf. So we too cannot either help or advise ourselves, that we may obtain rest and peace of conscience, and escape the devil, death and hell, unless Christ himself brings us again and calls us to himself by his Word. And when we come to him and are in a state of faith, even then we are not able to keep ourselves in faith or be steadfast, unless he himself by his Word and power holds and carries us, because the devil every way and without ceasing watches for us, and lurks, round about us like a roaring lion, as St. Peter In 1 Pet. 5:8 says, to devour us. So that here it avails nothing whatever to boast of our free will and strength, either to begin or continue our return to the Shepherd, and to abide with him, but Christ alone, our Shepherd, must do everything.

62. But now we are certain of this, that as long as we lie around the neck of Christ, we shall be safe from all terror and misfortune. For he will certainly not permit us to be torn from his neck, nor will he cast us off, because he is so happy and of good cheer that he once again has his sheep, and can bring it back to the rest of the flock. In short, there is nothing here of terror, driving and commanding, but a simple friendly carrying and a mere life of grace, by which he cares for his sheep in the tenderest manner. On the contrary, Moses, not like a shepherd of poor, weak sheep, but of rough, strong cattle, with his staff and rod drives his herd before him a three days journey into the wilderness, Ex. 3:1, until they become weary; for such treatment is proper for hardened and proud people.

63. Even we also, when we come under Moses, namely, according to the flesh and the external life, must then go ourselves and do what the law demands. But according to our faith we must not suffer any work to be forced upon us or required of us, but only permit ourselves to be carried and raised up most tenderly, not on horse and chariot, but

on his own back and shoulders. Which, as I said, is done, when he permits his Word to be preached unto us, that he died for us, and bore our sins in his own body on the cross, and put the devil with death and sin under his feet, and has led us unto eternal life, and always carries us as long as we live, so that we need not look to our life, how good and strong we are, but only lie upon his shoulders. For in this circle or article of faith we need not be troubled about any sin, death or life, but we have all things in Christ who carries and defends us.

64. Now he is not satisfied with the two parts, that he so lovingly seeks the lost sheep, and carries it so gently and with joy; but also when he brings it home he appoints a special feast and season of joy, and calls together his friends and neighbors that they may rejoice with him. Yea, he makes such a great jubilee, that God in heaven together with all the heavenly hosts and all creatures rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. By this he shows and explains who it is that is called a lost sheep, namely, the sinner who repents, that is, who feels his sins and is heartily sorry on account of them, and would gladly be free from them and come to Christ and amend his life, which is called having a miserable, sorrowful heart and an afflicted conscience, which the devil attacks, that it might perish with sorrow and sadness. For Christ is such a man who seeks and carries no sheep except that which is lost and knows no refuge or help of its own.

65. And now consider, how could he preach still more friendly and comfortingly, or what more should he do to make the heart joyful, and awaken a strong confidence in him? Since we see such a Shepherd, we miserable sinners are painted forth by him, who so unwillingly loses his sheep and so anxiously seeks it, and when he has found it carries it with all joy, and spreads forth such joy that all the angels and saints in heaven, yea, and all creatures rejoice and smile over us so friendly, that even the sun must shine much more lovely. For as it is natural that when a man is sorrowful, the sun and everything looks dark to him, and again when the heart is happy, then man appears twice as joyful, and everything looks to him lighter and brighter.

66. Now he who can firmly believe this, shall also receive true consolation and joy in and through Christ the Lord, because he has here the certain promise, that if he cleave thus unto Christ, and permit himself to be carried on his shoulders, that he is a dear guest in the kingdom of heaven, and will be received with great joy.

67. But we have altogether a different feeling in the sorrow and melancholy of the conscience, when the heart cannot think otherwise than that every angel stands behind us with a drawn sword, so that we can have no good cheer either from God or angels, that even some cannot behold any creature with joy, and fear the friendly sun itself, yea,

every leaf that stirs. All which arises from tormenting and consuming themselves with their own thoughts, from which they would gladly disentangle themselves, and labor so much and feel so good that they need not fear; but by this they only make the evil worse.

68. But if you desire to possess true comfort and joy in your soul, then only learn to impress this lovely picture and word of this Gospel in your heart, that you may seek it where it is to be found, namely, in Christ, and nowhere else. For in this man you will find all things, if you only remain under his protection and lie still upon his shoulders. But whatever joy may be sought outside of him, never enters the heart, even if you took to your aid all creatures, and had in one place the joy and pleasure of the whole world.



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